

No increased danger after Yosemite rocks fall

September 30 2017, by Scott Smith



In this photo provided by Peter Zabrok, climber Ryan Sheridan who had just reached the top of El Capitan, a 7,569-foot (2,307 meter) formation, when a rock slide let loose below him Thursday, Sept. 28, 2017, in Yosemite National Park, Calif. It was not immediately clear if there were new casualties, a day after another slab dropped from El Capitan, killing a British climber and injuring a second. (Peter Zabrok via AP)

A geological analysis Friday found there was no more danger than usual of another giant rock fall after two huge slides, including one involving a slab of granite the size of a 36-story building, occurred this week on the famed El Capitan rock formation.

One person was killed and two injured in the successive [rock](#) falls on Wednesday and Thursday at the climbing mecca.

"If we felt any area was unsafe we wouldn't be allowing people in there," Yosemite geologist Greg Stock said Friday.

He and a U.S. Geological Service geologist were studying the mountain after the rock falls that awed but did not deter people in the close-knit climbing community.

"It's kind of an inherently dangerous sport," Hayden Jamieson, 24, of Mammoth Lakes, California, said as he prepared to head up El Capitan early Saturday.

The park typically sees about 80 rock falls a year.

Elite climbers who make their way up the sheer rock faces with ropes and their fingertips understand the risk but also know it's rare to get hit and killed by rocks.

In addition, Stock said it's impossible to predict when and where a rock fall will strike. Detecting shifts in rocks could be a sign that one will break loose days or maybe years later, he said.

Geologists don't think climbers who pound stakes into the granite wall or hang from ropes during their treks have much effect on the stability of the mountainside.



In this photo provided by Peter Zabrok, climber Ryan Sheridan who had just reached the top of El Capitan, a 7,569-foot (2,307 meter) formation, when a rock slide let loose below him Thursday, Sept. 28, 2017, in Yosemite National Park, Calif. It was not immediately clear if there were new casualties, a day after another slab dropped from El Capitan, killing a British climber and injuring a second. (Peter Zabrok via AP)

"I am a scientist, so I won't rule it out entirely," Stock said. "We don't see a strong link between climbing and rock falls."

He said the climbers are relatively minuscule compared to the massive granite rocks they scale.

The slide on Wednesday featuring the building-sized boulder killed

Andrew Foster, 32, of Wales, who was hiking with his wife at the bottom of El Capitan and preparing to ascend El Capitan far from trails used by most Yosemite visitors,

The massive slab of granite that fell Thursday weighed 30,500 tons (27,669 metric tonnes), geologists estimate.

That fall injured Jim Evans, who was driving out of the national park when rubble broke through the sunroof of his SUV, hitting the resident of Naples, Florida, in the head, said his wife.



Emergency personnel prepare to care for an elderly male, center background, after a rock fall occurred again on El Capitan Thursday afternoon, Sept. 28, 2017 in Yosemite National Park, Calif. Yosemite National Park says another rock fall has injured one person in the park, one day after a huge chunk of granite killed a British tourist. An immense mass of granite plunged from the side of El Capitan on Thursday and filled the valley below with a cloud of dust.

(Eric Paul Zamora/The Fresno Bee via AP)

Rachel Evans, told KSEE-TV of Fresno (bit.ly/2x1EnIU) that the family had just finished a three-day visit to Yosemite.

"We didn't know what had happened, but it shattered (the glass) and the dust just poured in," Evans said. "We were trying to outrun it; it was like 'Go! Let's go!' and at the same time my husband reached up and he was like 'Oh, my head, my head' because it was bleeding profusely and hurting."

Climber Ryan Sheridan, of Buffalo, New York, had been scaling the route for days with a partner when the granite slab fell Wednesday below them.

He said he and his partner, Peter Zabrok, had slept on the wall in the fall zone a couple of nights before the slab came crumbling down.

Sheridan, 25, said he was spooked after hammering a pin into the wall that didn't sound right.



Emergency personnel prepare to care for an elderly man, center background, who was injured after a new rock fall on El Capitan occurred Thursday afternoon, Sept. 28, 2017, in Yosemite National Park, Calif. The fall came a day after tons of rock crashed down from El Capitan, killing a tourist who had been on a hiking and climbing trip and injuring a British woman with him. (Eric Paul Zamora/The Fresno Bee via AP)

"The entire wall seemed to be making hollow noises. When you hit the wall, you could hear echo all around you," he said.

Some climbers were stressed Friday as they weighed whether to take one of about 100 routes up El Capitan or do another big climb in the park, said Josh Edwards, 21, of Bend, Oregon.

"It's kind of scary thinking that an entire cliff side can come off,"

Edwards said. "The general feeling is everybody's a little scared. At least I am."

Ian Mort, 60, of Los Angeles could smell the dust from the rock fall Thursday while he sat in jammed traffic and headed into the park for his first trip, but he said he wasn't concerned.

"Mother Earth changes every day, and we just have to get used to it, I guess," he said.



Visitors watch the rock fall from El Capitan Meadow Thursday, Sept. 28, 2017, in Yosemite National Park, Calif. Yosemite National Park says another rock fall has injured one person in the park, one day after a huge chunk of granite killed a British tourist. An immense mass of granite plunged from the side of El Capitan on Thursday and filled the valley below with a cloud of dust. (Eric Paul Zamora/The Fresno Bee via AP)

Foster's former colleagues at the Up and Under outdoor gear store in Cardiff, Wales, recalled him in a statement as a man whose passion for the outdoors, "and mountains in particular, was enormous and infectious."

His wife, Lucy, was seriously injured.

The last time a [climber](#) was killed by falling rock at Yosemite was in 2013, when a Montana climber fell after a rock dislodged and sliced his climbing rope. It was preceded by a 1999 rock fall that crushed a climber from Colorado. Park officials say rock falls overall have killed 16 people since 1857 and injured more than 100.



An elderly male is helped into an ambulance after a rock fall occurs Thursday afternoon, Sept. 28, 2017, in Yosemite National Park, Calif. Yosemite National Park says another rock fall has injured one person in the park, one day after a huge chunk of granite killed a British tourist. An immense mass of granite plunged from the side of El Capitan on Thursday and filled the valley below with a cloud of dust. (Eric Paul Zamora/The Fresno Bee via AP)



Vikki Glinkskii, bottom right, a climber steward with Ask A Climber, calls her boss from El Capitan Meadow to tell him about a new rockfall as white dust is thrown into the air at the Waterfall Route on El Capitan Thursday afternoon, Sept. 28, 2017, in Yosemite National Park, Calif. Yosemite National Park says another rock fall has injured one person in the park, one day after a huge chunk of granite killed a British tourist. (Eric Paul Zamora/The Fresno Bee via AP)



A second rock fall occurs at El Capitan Thursday, Sept. 28, 2017, in Yosemite National Park, Calif. Yosemite National Park says another rock fall has injured one person in the park, one day after a huge chunk of granite killed a British tourist, Andrew Foster, 32, of Wales, while he and his wife were hiking at the bottom of El Capitan. An immense mass of granite plunged from the side of El Capitan on Thursday and filled the valley below with a cloud of dust. (Eric Paul Zamora/The Fresno Bee via AP)



This Thursday, Sept. 28, 2017 photo provided by The National Park Service shows a rock fall off the iconic El Capitan rock formation in Yosemite National Park, Calif. A massive new rock fall hit Yosemite National Park on Thursday, cracking with a thundering roar off the iconic El Capitan rock formation and sending huge plumes of white dust surging through the valley floor below. (The National Park Service via AP)



This Thursday, Sept. 28, 2017 photo provided by The National Park Service shows a rock fall off the iconic El Capitan rock formation in Yosemite National Park, Calif. A massive new rock fall hit Yosemite National Park on Thursday, cracking with a thundering roar off the iconic El Capitan rock formation and sending huge plumes of white dust surging through the valley floor below. (The National Park Service via AP)



This photo provided by Tamara Goode shows vehicles among a massive cloud of thick dust spreading across Yosemite Valley after a new rock fall from El Capitan Thursday, Sept. 28, 2017, in Yosemite National Park, Calif. Yosemite said on its Twitter page that the park was closing a road on the north side of the park because of the rock fall. Officials advised visitors to use the southern access road. (@wherestamara/Tamara Goode via AP)



In this Wednesday Sept. 27, 2017, photo provided the National Park Service, a cloud of dust is seen on El Capitan after a major rock fall in Yosemite National Park, Calif. An official says the man killed when a massive hunk of rock fell of Yosemite National Park's El Capitan monolith was a British climber. Yosemite park ranger and spokesman Scott Gediman said Thursday that the man was with a British woman who was seriously injured. (Tom Evans/National Park Service via AP)



In this Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2017, photo provided by Dakota Snider, photographer and Yosemite resident, a woman is carried into a helicopter after being rescued off El Capitan following a major rock fall in Yosemite National Park, Calif. All areas in California's Yosemite Valley are open Thursday, a day after the fatal rock fall. (Dakota Snider via AP)



In this Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2017, photo provided by Dakota Snider, photographer and Yosemite resident, a woman is lowered by a helicopter after being lifted off El Capitan following a major rock fall in Yosemite National Park, Calif. All areas in California's Yosemite Valley are open Thursday, a day after the fatal rock fall. (Dakota Snider via AP)



In this Wednesday Sept. 27, 2017, photo provided John P. DeGrazio, a cloud of dust is seen in the distance on El Capitan after a major rock fall in Yosemite National Park, Calif. All areas in California's Yosemite Valley are open Thursday, a day after the fatal rock fall. (John P. DeGrazio/YExplore Yosemite Adventures via AP)



In this Wednesday Sept. 27, 2017, photo provided by Dakota Snider, photographer and Yosemite resident, a helicopter makes a rescue off El Capitan after a major rock fall in Yosemite National Park, Calif. All areas in California's Yosemite Valley are open Thursday, a day after the fatal rock fall. (Dakota Snider via AP)

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